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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the work of Charles Curran, this paper proposes ways in which the training of teachers might be facilitated through regular counseling. Anxiety is seen as the chief difficulty in the conventional training process. This anxiety, caused by fear of making mistakes, of losing job security, or of performing in public and being evaluated, can be minimized by a careful application of counseling principles in the interaction of the trainer and the trainee, most significantly following the trainee's early teaching demonstrations. Training processes hinge on the concept of the "understanding response," requiring the trainer to not only evaluate the trainee, but also attempt to understand his anxiety. The training process described has two phases: (1) valuation, or understanding of the trainee's experience; and (2) instruction, during which the trainee builds on what he has already learned and corrects mistakes. A detailed description of specific interactions and their likely consequences is provided. (CLK)

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Teacher Training: A Counseling Focus© 1976

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on the work of Dr. Charles A. Curran, this paper proposes ways in which the training of teachers might be facilitated through regular counseling. The authors discuss the causes of what they see as the chief difficulty of the conventional training process, mounting anxiety on both sides. They propose to minimize anxiety by a careful application of counseling principles in the interaction of trainer and trainee, most significantly following the trainee's early demos. They provide a detailed description of specific interactions and their likely consequences.

The purpose of this presentation is to propose and describe the incorporation of a counseling modality into the teacher-training process.

It takes as its primary source the work of Dr. Charles A. Curran who, drawing on the work of Carl Rogers and others, has provided the most thorough application of counseling techniques to the issues of language teaching. He has, in the process, developed the counseling modality as more than a "technique," preferring to call it a "process" typifying a kind of inter-personal interaction with implications running far beyond teaching.

This paper does not propose to instruct the reader in classroom counseling, nor in training Community Language Learning teachers. Rather, we are dealing here with ways that the counseling modality might form the basis of trainer-trainee interaction regardless of subject matter, particularly at two junctures of the training process. These are (1) the

*The authors are not psychologists but teacher trainers. They do not claim to be offering here the final word on Counseling as it relates to the training of language teachers. They are, rather, suggesting an area which might profitably be mined by others. They are indebted to Dr. Curran and his staff, particularly Dr. Jennybelle Rardin who was good enough to review this material. The authors assume full responsibility, of course, for persistent error. Anyone interested in going further should contact Counseling-Learning Institutes, P.O. Box 3867, Apple River, Illinois 61001. The authors have no official connection with Counseling-Learning Institutes.

initial determination of goals for the training process, which we'll allude to only briefly; and (2) the post-practice teaching 'critiquing' session between trainer ($T_{r.}$) and trainee ($T_{e.}$), which we view as the most important nexus in the on-going trainer-trainee relationship.

In our view, the teacher-training process is a highly threatening one for both participants.

The T_e is afraid that his attempts at teaching will not meet with approval. The T_r, for his part, is afraid that what he has to teach will be misunderstood, rejected, or found inadequate. This stems, in part, from the relativism of teaching strategies in the post-audio-lingual age we now find ourselves in. When a T_r is confronted with a number of competing and tangential strategies, he is likely to feel at least a little unsure of what he is about. Unless both participants in the teacher-training process are very careful, their behavior frequently leads to learning/teaching strategies that reinforce their mutual fears and stall the process.

Let's take a look at why this process is potentially a threatening one for the T_e as well as the T_r. There are at least three reasons:

In the first place, this anxiety stems from the way

education takes place today. There is an assumption in much that we do in the classroom that 'I don't know' is equivalent to 'I am wrong' or 'I am bad.' Consequently, the ambitious student makes defensive moves to mask his fear of making an error. Philip W. Jackson comments on this in his study of classroom behavior: "Learning how to make it in school involves, in part, learning how to falsify our behavior." (Jackson 1968: 27)

It is inevitable that the T_e will make mistakes. So far from being regrettable, this is actually crucial to any learning process. In teacher training, the T_e must <u>feel</u> the reasons for doing whatever he does. He must be able to act as a whole person in the classroom - actively aware of the rationale for teaching/learning interaction. It is a sad fact, however, that the T_e is often made to feel invalid if he cannot attest constantly that he knows the answer: that he is right. Unless the T_e is free to risk himself in the commission of error, he will not develop a teaching personality which has integrity, which is integrated with his extra-scholastic self.

Secondly, the teacher-training process, though educational in nature, flows directly into work. Whether the T_e is being trained on the job or in a university course, he knows his T_r

has incalculable economic power over him. If he fails to meet the T_r's criteria of behavior, which frequently form a hidden agenda in the process, he may be denied employment or at least pigeon-holed as to employability. On the other hand, the T_r's reputation and income also depend on the T_e's performance, since whatever he does reflects on the T_r's competence. In our experience, therefore, a kind of mutual defensiveness frequently arises which, while it may not totally block the process to be undertaken, impedes it in ways inappropriate to an experience whose goal is independent behavior. We see Curran's humanistic model as a way of freeing both participants to engage fully, to <u>invest</u> themselves in the process.

Thirdly, as we've already mentioned, the teacher training process is a form of teaching/learning behavior which asks the participants to risk themselves profoundly. The T_e, in particular, is being asked to <u>behave</u> in public and be evaluated. This is normally quite threatening for anyone, even a performer accustomed to the Scylla and Charybdis of audience and critic. It is certainly threatening to someone previously accustomed, as most T_es are, to the comparatively passive role of student. If, as has been mentioned, this active role is also tied to employment, the process becomes a double-barrelled threat

frequently causing feelings of inadequacy which must be masked by defensive tactics. Again, the problem is to free the T_e so he can give his whole person to the process at hand.

Having now dealt in some detail with this matter of the anxiety that runs throughout the training process like a low-grade fever, we have also got to take a look at what the T_e brings to the process in the cognitive domain. Trainees are not, as we may have mistakenly suggested, simply quivering nerve impulses looking for a synapse. They are also fully cognizant human beings who bring, almost without exception, some expertise to the process of training. We take it as a priority of training that the T_r must somehow discover what skills the T_e has ready mastered, as these are the basis of the training. We see Curran's model as being, not only the means of anxiety-reduction in the T_r, and T_e, but also the way that the channels of communication between them can be opened and cleaned out. These can then become conduits of information about the T_e, his pre-dispositions about the process, his knowledge of language transfer, of classroom interaction, etc. This, then, is a by-product of the reduction or elimination of behavior-limiting anxieties.

It is an assumption of this presentation that anxiety

must be accepted and lowered if real learning/teaching is to take place. In Curran's terms, the "learning becomes self-defeating when the learner projects the suffering and anxiety of learning onto any convenient object. Usually that object is someone who is sincerely trying to do a certain thing but, in fact, is seen as an attacking figure. . ." (Curran 1972: 128)

Again in Curran's terms, ". . .the student's state of self-worth seems to determine the degree to which he can learn. . . openly and without defense. . ./and see/ learning not as something attacking him and from which he must defend himself with a good, or at least a passing grade, but as something positively invoking his genuine self-investment and permanent self-indentification." (Curran 1975: 2)

The question then becomes how to "invoke his genuine self-investment" in the process.

What we propose is that the counseling processes devised and described at length by Curran become the model of T_r-T_e interaction in the training process.

To simplify a complex matter, these processes hinge on the concept of the "understanding response." That is, the T_r, if

he is to enable learning, must learn to make responses that clearly apprehend what the T_e is going through. He must temporarily suspend his judgment of the T_e's behavior, verbal or otherwise, and demonstrate, by recapitulating what the T_e has said, that he has "entered his world" and shares the experience.

It is important to note here that we are not talking about a technique for handling, manipulating, or solving the personal problems of the T_e. We are talking about a form of interpersonal interaction such as all of us sometimes engage in, though rarely with the intensity we propose here. It is, in fact, a life process.

A "counselor" or T_r must, in Curran's words, "...control his urge to place judgmental and diagnostic labels on what he is hearing from the client (T_e). Otherwise he will begin to write some type of problem-solving prescription. We know that this is the surest way for the client not only to feel deeply misunderstood but also to be made hostile and defensive. He can become so resistant that he withdraws genuine openness and trust in the communication with the counselor (T_r). Such intellectual departmentalizing and categorizing of what the client is saying and turning it into an 'ought-to' voice of

conscience, . . .thwarts the self-engagement and commitment of both counselor and client." (Curran 1972: 53)

To re-state it, the T_r who commits himself to these intricate processes must listen, even feel, exactly what the T_e is communicating, and feed it back. He does this, not by regurgitating the T_e's words verbatim, but by expressing with his own language what the T_e projects. It requires an intensive effort not to employ one's own evaluative categories, but instead to accept the T_e's and use them. Needless to say, the T_e communicates feelings as well as ideas, and the T_r must be ready to apprehend both of these, accept them, and communicate them.

In a typical counseling session, the T_e makes a statement about, let's say, the reading assigned or the experience of teaching a class, and the T_r, accepting this, provides him with a paraphrase or summary in a supportive tone of voice.

Counseling proceeds accordingly with the T_e making statements and the T_r replying in a warm, sympathetic manner. In this way, with the T_r listening and responding to the "whole person" of the T_e with "whole person" responses, the T_e becomes, as he should, the focus of the training session. It is, after

all, not the T_r's interaction with the material that is or ought to be primary in the training, but the T_e himself, wholly engaged in internalizing the material for his own purposes. In this way, the T_e can grow to function independently of the T_r in the role of teacher.

This form of interaction leads quickly to a much deeper consideration of the issues than is possible in the action-reaction modality. Though it may appear aimless and undirected at first, this kind of interaction brings the material and, more importantly, the T_e's reaction to it into much sharper focus. It helps the T_e know himself realistically and respectfully. It also helps the T_r clarify his role vis à vis the T_e. The T_e brings his sense of what is going on to the training sessions; the T_r lends him his structure to make mutually satisfying statements expressive of what the T_e sees. Together, they go through what in Curran's paradigm are referred to as particularization, symbolization, and investment. Gradually, as the T_e's experience is reflected and defined, choices begin to emerge. In a "questing together," both the T_r and the T_e can arrive at an acceptable course of action.

Thus, in Curran's words, the participants are "convalidated." As they both confront with precision what the T_e is going

through in his search for suitable behavior, their roles are mutually and positively defined, thus enabling each to make a firmer commitment to the process. The process thus becomes one of profound confirmation of self for both participants.

Up to now, we have discussed what goes on in a counseling session as if nearly everything flowed from the T_e to the T_r, with the T_r functioning as a kind of retaining wall enabling the T_e to see the limits of his own experience. Inevitably, however, in any teacher-training process the T_r must stand as well as understand. It would be deceptive to suggest that the T_r never comments, speaking out of his own world, on the behavior of the T_e. There are, to be diagrammatic and simplistic, always two phases to a training process: (1) valuation and (2) instruction.

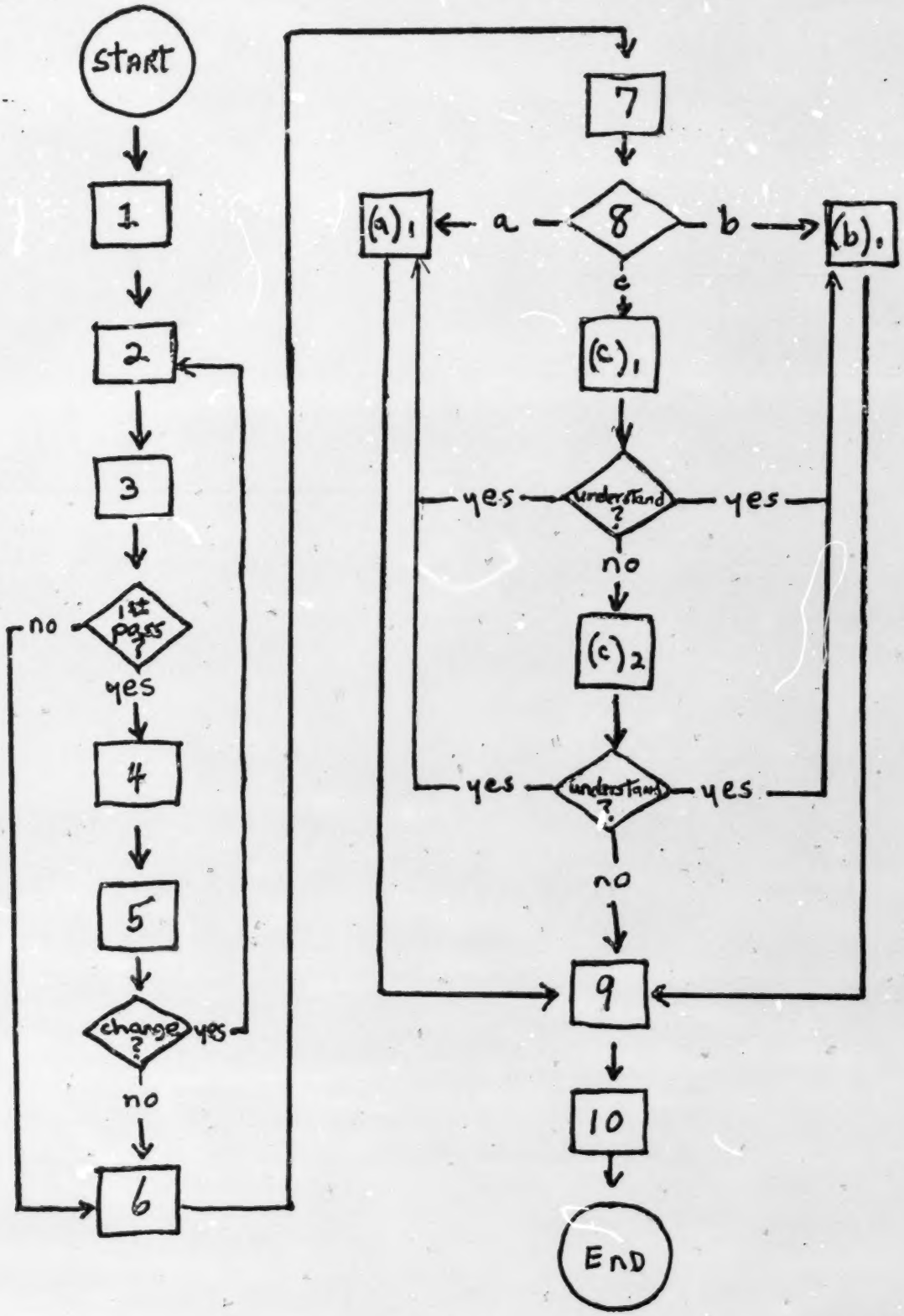
In the first phase of a training process, the T_r and the T_e collectively discover, in the manner described, the unique value of the T_e's experience: in the classroom. In the second phase, the T_e needs the T_r's instruction in order to move onward. We describe these here as if they were discrete phases of the training of teachers when, in fact, they are the magnetic poles of a constantly shifting pattern of interaction.

In the course of this counseling experience, in fact, a

remarkable reversal of roles is likely to occur, and occur with increasing frequency. In the shift here described, the T_e, having clarified to his own satisfaction what has gone before, or having reached the stage of symbolization, is likely to signal the T_r that he is open to suggestion. He asks the T_r for help. This, it is important to note, is not the conventional ruse which we have all mastered of asking for criticism in order to defuse it. Rather, when this moment is reached in an on-going program of counseling - and it is reached often - the T_r is clearly being invited to speak from his world and not the T_e's. This shift involves a curious reversal because the T_e is effectively offering to become the understander, to accept whatever help the T_r can provide in resolving whatever issue has arisen. The T_r's ability to read the T_e's signals and to effect the shift in roles is crucial to a training program such as we describe.

In the accompanying diagram, we illustrate a common pattern of T_r-T_e interaction, in the counseling modality.

MODIFIED FLOW CHART OF COUNSELING APPROACH TO TRAINING



Steps in a Counseling Approach to Teacher Training

VALUATION

1. T_r explains exactly what kind of power he has and will exercise over T_e.

[Structuring]

nb. "He" actually refers to "he or she," which, though politically more refined, is too cumbersome here.

2. T_e tells T_r his expectations and objectives:
   (a) What he wants to get from their association.
   (b) How he sees his teaching role.
   (c) What he wants to do in the classroom.

   T_r GIVES UNDERSTANDING RESPONSES THROUGHOUT.

[Goal Setting]

Here it is very useful for T_r & T_e to be using an objective instrument of observation & analysis. It provides a common language for discussing objective. The Fanselow F.O.-C.U.S. System provides what these authors consider the most inclusive system.

3. T_r summarizes and restates T_e's objectives and asks for confirmation that he has understood correctly.

4. OBSERVATION OF T_e's CLASS:
   T_r notes carefully how T_e's objectives were achieved or approximated.
   T_r does NOT note what T_e failed to do or could have done differently.

[Practice Teaching]

Here an observation instrument assists T_r to see objectively what was done and what that achieved. Furthermore, what was not done is listed in the system; it's available when it's asked for.

5. T_r begins the post-observation discussion by recalling & restating the T_e's objectives, and requesting that T_e verify:
   (a) That the restatement is correct, and
   (b) That those are still the T_e's objectives.

   IF Te WANTS TO CHANGE, REPEAT STEPS 2 & 3.

6. T_r DOES NOT: (a) "Say something nice" about the lesson, and then 'zap' T_e with a critique.
(b) Tell T_e <u>anything</u> about what he observed or about what could have been done or should have been done instead.

7. T_r listens to, and understands, T_e's view of lesson. ..... This is a crucial part of valuation. The T_e is clarifying the experience for himself.

Generally, there are two phases here:
(a) T_e talks about anything and everything that went on. (This needs to be accepted.)
(b) T_e is able to focus on what went on with regard to his objectives. (May need some channeling from the T_r, to get into this.)

T_r GIVES UNDERSTANDING RESPONSES THROUGHOUT.

INSTRUCTION

8. TRANSITION POINT ..... Doesn't necessarily occur in every conference.
This is the point where it feels mutually "fitting" to move on from <u>only</u> understanding of the T_e's viewpoint to acceptance of the T_r's instruction.

Transition may be in one or more of these directions: ..... This breakdown of the transition is not intended to preclude (d), (e), (f), etc.

(a) T_e has seen and specified some things he 'did wrong', & has asked how to do them better.
T_r restates this, & asks if T_e wants to be given suggestions, to figure things out on his own, to have a demo, to read a book, or etc.
T_r gives a clear & reasonable

(a) choice, & accepts T_e's answer.
T_r follows thru' on instructions.

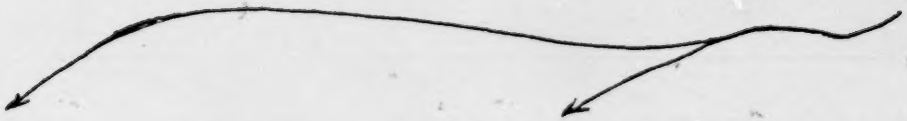
(b) T_e has said he wants to change his objective(s) or may be just heading toward a different emphasis.
T_r restates the old & new objectives. Asks for T_e's verification.
T_r points out differences. Asks if differences are clear. T_r asks T_e to specify whether he wants to change, combine, or stick with the old.
T_r accepts T_e's choice.

(c) T_e really thinks he's achieved his objective; but actually he's way off the track. (T_r really has understood him; he has been saying so.)
T_r understandingly re-caps T_e's viewpoint.
T_r contrasts that with his own viewpoint, and what he saw T_e do.
T_r understandingly says how he thinks T_e's misunderstanding might have arisen. (It usually <u>isn't</u> stupidity; there's a <u>reasonable</u> explanation.)

$(c)_1$ T_r asks if T_e understands & agrees with the different viewpoint. If he does agree, the T_r and T_e can skip step $(c)_2$.

$(c)_2$ Chances are good T_e will get very defensive; will attempt to excuse himself &/or prove T_r wrong.

T_r listens AND GIVES UNDERSTANDING RESPONSES. (T_r "hurt" T_e for his own good, but it did hurt. T_e "has a right to bleed"!)



See (a) above

See (b) above

An impasse. T_e does not in any way reach an acceptance of T_r's viewpoint.

Drop it! T_r tries to think of T_e as 'having difficulty internalizin and tries <u>not</u> to think of T_e as du and/or antagonistic. A fourth possibility is that the T_e's ideas have more validity than the T_r originally thought. T_r accepts and apologizes and proceeds to (a) or (b).

9. T_r & T_e mutually decide on what T_e is going to do in next lesson(s).

Decision-making is a combination of understanding responses and normal, courteous democratic process.

T_r makes sure T_e can accurately re-state what he will be expected to do.

Here again, an observation instrument provides a useful common language, and a list of possible teaching behaviors. Further, it provides a means of zeroing in on, and specifying, the desired behaviors.

10. T_r gives T_e some warning about how the expected new behavior might feel to the T_e.

Anybody doing something new is likely to feel awkward & scared - and to <u>be</u> pretty awkward, too. T_r reassures T_e that that's normal & okay and that he understands & appreciates the courage it'll take.

nb. In taking a Counseling approa it is imperative that the T_e not get the impression the T_r is '<u>usi</u> Counseling-Learning on him.' Peop dislike having techniques used up them. The best way to avoid the T_e getting such an impression is for the T_r to avoid thinking of the process in those terms.

Even a casual perusal of the preceding chart reveals the central question in the human interaction described: how can the T_r tell that the T_e is ready to make the essential shift from being understood to receiving instruction? There is no hard and fast answer to this question. Sometimes the signal comes in the form of a request, e.g. "Do you have any suggestions?" Frequently, however, it does not. In understanding this somewhat difficult shift arising from the dynamic of T_r-T_e interaction, four considerations are important.

In the first place as we've stated above, the distinction between valuation and instruction, while very real, is not a sharp break. If properly undertaken, the counseling becomes a "questing together" in which the T_r and the T_e invest themselves in equal measure. Thus, properly seen, the interaction of T_e and T_r rarely leads to a dramatic shift in roles. Rather, it leads to a kind of mutual nudging in the profoundly cooperative search for answers, each participant taking whatever role feels appropriate.

Secondly, counseling is normally carried out within a time frame set down at the beginning of a session. Thus, by indirection, the T_e is led to edit what he has to say to make it fit the situation. In this way, the counseling is given

shape and scope, and together the T_r and T_e agree to avoid the kind of aimless wandering over unfamiliar terrain that can lead nowhere. In order to derive the benefit of mutual structure, it is important that both T_r and T_e avoid pooling their ignorance.

Thirdly, and perhaps most important, the T_e sometimes becomes quite emotional in the process of counseling. He may exhibit or express dependency and anxiety. Gradually these give way to independence and sometimes anger directed at the T_r. Curran describes this as ". . .an almost dramatic determination for learning growth, which is sometimes manifested as strong self-assertion over the knower, and even anger if the learner is impeded from using what he has learned." (Curran 1972: 103)

Far from being a negation of the process, this is its affirmation. The emotional energy shows that the T_e is personally invested in the process of learning. Nevertheless, the emotion of a T_e, particularly when directed against the T_r, is very difficult to accept and respond to appropriately. The expression of personal emotion in a professional context is, culturally, embarrassing, if not threatening. However, in a counseling modality, the acceptance of negative as well

as positive emotions is the only way to foster whole-person learning.

Finally, a counseling process on the cognitive level leads quickly and importantly to a shared sense of what one knows and what one does not. It is an intensive effort to make the clearest possible statements about the understanding one has achieved, and, by implication, about the limits of this understanding. From the T_e's point of view, the feeling that the T_r is questing closely makes it more comfortable to admit that one is lost. In any case, together the T_r and T_e have arrived at the clearest possible statement they can make about the experience at hand.

How does it feel from the T_r's point of view to engage in this radically different approach to the training of teachers?

In the first place, the T_r is likely to be struck by how slow the process seems at first. This derives in part from our expectations about how fast things normally move. We are conditioned to expect information to flow at us with a rapidity and intensity that is very hard to control. As a consequence, we have developed a variety of defensive mechanisms which enable us to stem the tide by selecting information out before it really penetrates. What the counselor quickly learns is

that he must drop these defenses; he must eliminate the filtration process he has acquired: he must accept. In short, the T_r has to slow himself down. The T_e, for his part, is rarely slowed down at all. The authors have generally been astonished and delighted at the T_es' rates of progress even though at first the process seemed to weigh and weigh heavily.

Secondly, the T_r must learn initially, and learn anew with each subsequent T_e, to accept not only the T_e's pace, but also the depth to which he elects to go. It is very tempting for a T_r, momentarily elated at what he perceives to be the direction the T_e is taking, to jump in with his own interpretation of what the T_e is saying. He is speaking out of his world. He is, conceivably, making the T_e's statements more interesting, more striking, by jumping to implications the T_e may never have intended. In counseling parlance, the counselor is "diving too deeply" and is likely to give the T_e pause and stall the process. The T_r should go only as far and as fast as the T_e appears ready to go himself. The trust the T_e invests in the T_r and in the process is a delicate underpinning which must not be broken. The T_r can destroy it if he "dives" beyond the T_e.

Finally, the T_r should not hesitate to stand if it is clearly fitting to do so. The whole process is a subtle, intuitive one available to anyone who accepts the premise that feelings are a valid part of a whole teaching/learning person. The T_r who has recently committed himself to the tricky business of understanding may feel anything from anxiety to terror at the necessity to stand for himself. However, the process is as much defeated by the T_r's failure to stand when necessary as by his failure to understand earlier on. The skill necessary to make that subtle transition regularly and effectively can be learned with time and practice. T_es, in fact, are often delightfully supportive of the T_r's efforts in this connection.

In conclusion, the teacher training envisaged by this presentation involves a studied self-consciousness leading to a deeper sense of self and self-worth. It involves a T_r "sick to teach," to free himself of binding processes engaging him only tentatively. It involves a T_e anxious to assume the role of which he feels himself capable. It provides the means for each to risk himself wholly and without fear. In our view, the extent to which they are both wholly engaged is the extent to which they are both likely to be wholly changed and mutually satisfied.

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